DISCERNING '**FUNCTIONAL ZERO**'

the homeless hub

PAPER #11

Considerations for Defining & Measuring an End to Homelessness in Canada

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COH Canadian Observatory on Homelessness the homeless hub

CAEH Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness

INTRODUCTION

The notion of ending homelessness has increasingly shaped public policy and community-based responses towards greater accountability and evidence-based decision making. In recent years, communities have begun to "declare" they have in fact achieved the goal of "Functional Zero" with respect to ending homelessness. New Orleans, for example, has publically announced they have ended veterans' homelessness, while Medicine Hat is gaining attention as "the first community to end chronic homelessness in Canada".

Despite promising signs of progress from such communities, there is no internationally recognized definition of what an end of homelessness entails, what the indicators and targets should be confirming such an achievement, or what process might validate whether a community has indeed met their goal.

To this end, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH), the University of Calgary School of Public Policy (SPP), and the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH) are supporting a collaborative process to develop a national definition of an end to homelessness. Through this process, we aim to also outline critical measures needed to confirm an end to homelessness and propose a set of indicators based on an international review of targets and on-the-ground experience of communities working in this direction.

WHY DOES A COMMON DEFINITION MATTER?

A common definition with measurable indicators will help us articulate what local systems aim to achieve in a consistent manner, allowing comparable analysis across jurisdictions and evidence-based assessment of policy implementation for government and funders. This will contribute to continuous quality improvement and enhanced performance towards common objectives, thereby informing investment decisions, system gap analysis, and policy change. This can advance our goals around system integration with tangible metrics that can be applied outside the homeless-serving sector as well.

Importantly, a common definition can help us address concerns and scepticism about "what it really means to end homelessness" encountered across stakeholder groups, including the public, media, politicians, service providers and those with lived experience. A common, measurable end to homelessness can demonstrate progress in a way that resonates across these groups and can further help our efforts.

WORK TO DATE

In developing this Working Paper, the COH and School of Public Policy worked to analyze the content of 60 existing plans and strategies from Canada, U.S., Australia, and Europe specific to defining an end to homelessness and any corresponding measures and indicators used. A small sample (six people) was also consulted as a starting point for understanding the perspectives of those with lived experience.

We also worked closely with U.S. colleagues from Abt Associates who are working with Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Veterans Affairs (VA) to conceptualize a common framework that defines an end to homelessness.

The conceptual framework developed as result of this work was presented at the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness conference in November 2015; feedback from experts on performance measurement in Canada and the U.S. obtained during the session was incorporated into this paper as well.

28 Municipal Plans
7 Provincial Plans
1 National Plan

2 Municipal Plans
6 National Plans

10 Municipal Plans
4 State Plans
1 National Plan

1 State Plan
1 National Plan

Table 1 Plans Analysed

MOVING FORWARD

This discussion paper summarises the research findings and proposes a draft framework for the definition for further discussion and input. It is being launched in May 2016 as a discussion paper with the intent of generating dialogue from diverse stakeholders nationally. Over the course of the coming months (May – November, 2016), the COH, CAEH and SPP will expand consultations on the proposed definition following a similar format to that used in developing a common Canadian definition of homelessness.
Key stakeholder groups to be consulted across Canada include:

- Funders and policy makers
- Service providers
- Diverse individuals with lived experience
- Public systems
- Researchers

FRAMING "FUNCTIONAL ZERO"

To begin, it is helpful to identify the two distinct approaches to defining an end to homelessness in the existing, primarily grey, literature. The "Functional Zero" approach describes the situation in a community where homelessness has become a manageable problem. That is, the availability of services and resources match or exceed the demand for them from the target population. Further, such resources are optimized, performing as intended with maximum efficacy. For example, a community may declare they have ended homelessness when they have enough supportive housing, shelter beds, service workers, and funds to assist the number of people accessing the services. This however, would be a simplistic and limited approach. In economic terms, we can simplify this concept to simply refer to reaching a balance in supply-demand, or steady-state.

The Functional Zero concept has some built-in flexibility allowing communities to custom-tailor performance targets to local circumstances and priorities. It can be seen as being politically appealing because progress towards an end to homelessness is achievable and measurable, without completely eliminating all homelessness and homelessness risk. This recognizes that homelessness and risk cannot be completely eradicated, nor can efforts undermine personal choice in some instances. Someone may refuse the resources and supports offered for a variety of reasons, signalling independent and autonomous decision-making about what is best in their situation.

Functional Zero is achieved when there are enough services, housing and shelter beds for everyone who needs it. In this approach, emergency shelters are meant to be temporary and the goal is permanent housing. While the focus on supports is to prevent homelessness to begin with, this may not always be possible and in such cases, a system that is responsive and acts quickly is essential. A key aim of homeless-serving systems is to provide immediate access to shelter and crisis services, without barriers to entry, while permanent stable housing and appropriate supports are being secured. Of course, determining the breath and depth of need in a community is often problematic. Certain sub-populations may not proactively seek assistance (i.e. youth, women, people who use illicit drugs), and we currently lack a solid methodology to enumerate the at-risk and hidden homeless population.

Alternatively, an "Absolute Zero" approach to defining an end to homelessness would entail the complete eradication of homelessness within a community. As compared to a Functional Zero definition, which is a relative measurement of the state of homelessness, Absolute Zero would suggest that communities that reach this point have the same amount of homeless people: zero. The approach benefits from being universal, setting a standard, across-the-board goal for all communities. The greatest barrier that prevents this approach from being widely adopted is that it is often seen as being unachievable or unrealistic; in fact, homelessness plans often acknowledge that bringing about an absolute end to homelessness is an ultimate, albeit, unrealistic goal.

We should not consider Functional and Absolute Zero as binary opposites, or a choice we have to make. In fact, we can consider achieving Functional Zero as a step towards the vision of Absolute Zero, though the latter may be more aspirational. As we move towards this vision, we are able to articulate and measure progress and adjust our strategies in real-time. We need to move efforts towards this ultimate vision with tangible and achievable goals that can be verified and measured across diverse regions.

It is integral to ensure that a definition of Functional Zero is aligned with a common definition of homelessness. For the purposes of this paper, we use the Canadian Definition on Homelessness (see Appendix 4) published by the COH.

CANADIAN DEFINITION ON HOMELESSNESS [1]

Homelessness describes the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing.

Homelessness describes a range of housing and shelter circumstances, with people being without any shelter at one end, and being insecurely housed at the other. That is, homelessness encompasses a range of physical living situations, organized here in a typology that includes

1. Unsheltered, or absolutely homeless and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation;

2. Emergency Sheltered, including those staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for those impacted by family violence;

3. Provisionally Accommodated, referring to those whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure, and finally,

4. At Risk of Homelessness, referring to people who are not homeless, but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards.

It should be noted that for many people homelessness is not a static state but rather a fluid experience, where one's shelter circumstances and options may shift and change quite dramatically and with frequency.

[1] Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, Canadian Definition of Homelessness, Available online: http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/COHhomelessdefinition.pdf

CURRENT DEFINITIONS OF ENDING HOMELESSNESS

An understanding of Functional and Absolute Zero lays the foundation for a deeper investigation into the ways in which an end to homelessness is being defined in policies, plans, and legislation. Despite the Canadian focus of this paper, it is useful to look at international examples to allow for a comparison of definitions, and further contextualize the discussion. Homelessness plans from the U.S., Australia, and several European countries were analyzed.

METHODOLOGY

To develop a detailed understanding of how the end of homelessness is being defined in Canada, a content analysis of readily accessible homelessness plans was conducted. It is important to note that we did not use a systematic approach to identifying the plans: plans were identified based on the communities featured in the 'Community Profile' on the Homeless Hub website, however some of the profiles were incomplete or dated so additional research was needed to find the most up-to-date plans. We aimed to review as many plans as possible across diverse jurisdictions until we saw consistent redundancy in the approaches.

In total, 28 municipal plans, 7 Provincial plans and the federal Homeless Partnership Strategy (HPS) plan were analyzed (see Appendix 1). Similarly, an analysis was done for homelessness plans from the U.S. In total, 10 municipal plans, four state plans and the federal homelessness plan were analyzed. The majority of these plans were sourced from the National Alliance to End Homelessness Ten Year Plan Database, which was compiled in 2010. Several of the municipal plans, specifically New Orleans, Salt Lake City, and Houston were intentionally picked because of recent reports that have indicated that they have ended veteran homelessness. It was anticipated that these plans might be distinct due to their supposed effectiveness. Other municipal plans were picked with the intention of creating a diverse sample, based on both the size and geography of the community. State plans were selected to complement the municipal plans being analyzed.

To gain an understanding of how the end of homelessness is being defined in European countries, an analysis was done on 7 national plans, along with 1 provincial plan, and 2 municipal plans. These plans were primarily sourced from the European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) website. Two plans from Australia were also included in the analysis. See Appendix 1 for a full listing.

The content analysis of these plans involved two steps: (1) looking for content that explicitly defines what ending homelessness means, and (2) looking for content that could implicitly define what the end of homelessness means: goals, targets, performance indicators, strategies and objectives.

The "Functional Zero" approach describes the situation in a community where homelessness has become a manageable problem. That is, the availability of servicesand resources match or exceed the demand for them from the target population.

Functional Zero is achieved when there are enough services, housing and shelter beds for everyone who needs it.

LIMITATIONS

For the purpose of this research, the depth and breadth of the content analysis provides a scan of how ending homelessness is being defined. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that the findings from the research may be limited. Firstly, not all homelessness plans across these jurisdictions were analyzed; secondly, the documents analyzed were those that were readily accessible online. In some instances, the researchers communicated with public officials to gain access to information when it was obvious that additional information existed but was not accessible online. It is likely, however, that other internal documents exist that could have provided greater insight into specific goals, targets, performance indicators, and objectives of the homelessness plans that were analyzed. Therefore, the conclusions drawn may be skewed because of undisclosed information that may have and continue to guide internal operations.

Another issue encountered was the unavailability of goals, targets, performance indicators and objectives for certain communities due to ongoing development. For example, the Region of Durham had not yet developed its performance measurements because consultations to establish them were still underway while this research was being conducted. Finally, the analysis was limited to plans available in English.

KEY FINDINGS

The findings from the analysis are organized by jurisdiction (Canada, U.S., Europe, Australia and New Zealand) and level of government as community-level or municipal plans have to be contextualised within national and regional (provincial/ state) approaches.

CANADA

Due to the multi-tier nature of homelessness initiatives in Canada, it is necessary to look at all three levels of government to develop a comprehensive understanding of how exactly the end of homelessness is being defined.

The federal government's Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) supports 61 communities in local efforts to prevent and reduce homelessness. HPS makes no claim to the goal of ending homelessness; rather, it aims to "prevent and reduce homelessness across Canada."[2] To measure whether or not progress is being made towards this goal, five key performance measures are used:

1. Decrease in the estimate number of shelter users who are chronically homeless;

2. Decrease in the estimated number of shelter users who are episodically homeless;

3. Decrease in the length of shelter stay;

4. Percentage of individuals placed in housing through a Housing First intervention who maintain housing; and

5. Amount invested by external partners for every dollar invested by the HPS.

In a document entitled "HPS Measurement" (see Appendix 2), the federal government expands upon the five key performance indicators and provides specific targets. For example, the document calls for a proposed reduction of 20% for the estimated number of people living on the street (sleeping rough) by 2017/18. HPS left many targets blank, opting to let communities set their own targets for performance measures, such as the number of days to move Housing First clients into permanent housing.

At the provincial level, there is very little consistency between the plans. Of the seven plans analyzed only Alberta provided an explicit description of what it means to end homelessness:[3]

> "[Ending homelessness] will mean that even though there may still be emergency shelters available for those who become homeless, those who become homeless will be re-housed into permanent homes within 21 days."

New Brunswick, while not providing an explicit definition, includes a vision for their homelessness framework that can be considered a quasi-definition of the end of homelessness:[4]

> "New Brunswick [will be] a province where chronic homelessness does not exist because people who are homeless or who are at-risk of being homeless can access a range of housing options, in a timely manner, to meet their specific needs along with supports and services that are equitable, effective and delivered in a respectful and compassionate manner."

The remaining provinces examined (Ontario, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba) either provided no discernable explicit or implicit definition or do not stipulate that ending homelessness is a goal. For example, while the province of Ontario, in their *Housing Policy Statement*,[5] stated their explicit goal of ending homelessness, they provide very little clue as to what this actually means both in the policy statement and within other policy documents such as its *Long Affordable Housing Strategy*.[6]

Ontario's homelessness strategy's *Program Guidelines for the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI)* includes two outcomes that point to its interpretation of progress towards ending homelessness: people experiencing homelessness obtain and retain housing and people at risk of homelessness remain housed.[7] Outside of this, however, the program guidelines do not specify goals or targets. Changes are underway in Ontario as the provincial government has recently committed to implementing a number of recommendation from an Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness, one of which is to set a target of ending chronic homelessness in 10 years.[8]

[2] Employment and Social Development Canada, Terms and Conditions of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (2014), http://www.esdc.gc.ca/eng/communities/homelessness/funding/terms.shtml

[3] Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years (2008), p.14, http://humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/PlanForAB_Secretariat_final.pdf

[4] New Brunswick Housing Corporation Department of Social Development, Hope is a Home: New Brunswick's Housing Strategy (2010), p.49, http://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/sd-ds/pdf/Housing/housingstrategy-e.pdf

[5] Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Ontario Housing Policy Statement, http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/AssetFactory.aspx?did=9262

[6] Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Building Foundations: Building Futures – Ontario's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy (2010), http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/AssetFactory.aspx?did=8590

[7] Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Program Guidelines for the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) (2012), p.16, http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/AssetFactory.aspx?did=10065

[8] Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Ontario Commits to Ending Chronic Homelessness in 10 Years (2015), http://news.ontario.ca/mah/en/2015/10/report-of-the-expert-advisory-panel-on-homelessness.html

Based on municipal plans analyzed, there seems to be a smaller proportion that offers an explicit definition of what it means to end homelessness. Of those that do provide an explicit definition, the majority are found in Alberta, with both Red Deer and Medicine Hat laying out definitions, respectively:

> "… we will be successful in ending homelessness in Red Deer when we have a system of care that can effectively and efficiently: [1] Prevent/divert vulnerable individuals from becoming homeless, or [2] Ensure those who are homeless have permanent, appropriate housing and the supports they require within 28 days of presenting for service within the system." [9]

> "An end to homelessness means that no one in our community will have to live in an emergency shelter or sleep rough for more than 10 days before they have access to stable housing and the supports needed to maintain it." [10]

Of the municipal plans analyzed in Ontario, only the City of Kingston provided an explicit idea of what ending homelessness would entail by using performance targets combined with some qualitative statements about the workings of the homeless-serving system: [11]

- No one is homeless for longer than 30 days
- Chronic and repeated episodes of homelessness are the exception
- The need for emergency shelters beds has been greatly reduced and shelter beds are an integral part of a housing system
- There are sufficient units of housing—including permanent supportive housing—so that people who are homeless have a place to go
- Housing and support workers rapidly respond as soon as individual or family become homeless
- Services are integrated, and there is coordinated access and assessment across the homeless and housing crisis response system
- Evidence-based practices have been adopted and service providers are constantly refined and improving their techniques based on new data

an "Absolute Zero" approach to defining an end to homelessness would entail the complete eradication of homelessness within a community.

An example from *A Place to Call Home: Nipissing District 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan 2014-2024 (2013)* illustrates the use of targets in lieu of an explicit definition: [12]

- Average length of stay an emergency shelter is less than 5 days.
- A 20% annual reduction in admissions to the emergency shelter; by the 5th year, total nights in shelter are at minimum levels.
- A 20% increase in the affordable housing supply; Nipissing Housing Development Corporation has created 250 new affordable housing units for singles and seniors.

What becomes evident from the Canadian examples, then, are differences in how ending homelessness is defined. While some plans provide measures and targets focusing on the effectiveness and availability of homeless services and housing, consistent with Functional Zero approaches, most nevertheless use these in the context of broader vision statements that align with the notion of Absolute Zero

[9] Red Deer & District Community Foundation, EveryOne's Home: Red Deer's Five Year Plan to End Homelessness 2014 to 2018 (2014), p.3, http://production.mhchs.ca/static/main-site/files/housing-development/Red-Deer-Plan.pdf

[10] Medicine Hat Housing Society, At Home in Medicine Hat: Our Plan to End Homelessness – January 2014 Update (2014), p.10, http://production.mhchs.ca/static/main-site/files/housing-development/Refocused-Plan-to-end-Homelessness.pdf

[11] City of Kingston, 10-Year Municipal Housing & Homelessness Plan in the City of Kingston and the County of Frontenac (2013), p.83, https://www.cityofkingston.ca/documents/10180/13880/10Year_HousingHomelssness_Plan.pdf/2498b02e-6832-4250-95fc-6372b2bfc490

[12] District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board, A Place to Call Home: Nipissing District 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan 2014-2024 (2014), p.58, http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/A%20Place%20to%20Call%20Home%20(FINAL).pdf

UNITED STATES

In 2015, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) amended the *Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness* with several important changes, one of which was the addition of an operational definition for an end to homelessness. [13]

The USICH notes "an end to homelessness does not mean that no one will ever experience a housing crisis again. Changing economic realities, the unpredictability of life and unsafe or unwelcoming family environments may create situations where individuals, families, or youth could experience or be at-risk of homelessness." USICH's definition is broad and speaks to the quality of a local homeless-serving system's effectiveness, rather than in terms of benchmarks and performance indicators. This again assumes a Functional Zero approach focused on aspects of effectiveness of the homeless-serving system.

More recently, the focus on veteran's homelessness in the U.S. has prompted HUD and the VA to become increasingly explicit about their criteria to confirm a community has indeed ended veterans' homelessness. These definitions include specific, measurable benchmarks that would be verified to confirm the community has indeed achieved the goal.

USICH DEFINITION OF ENDING HOMELESSNESS [14]

An end to homelessness means that every community will have a systematic response in place that ensures homelessness is prevented whenever possible or is otherwise a rare, brief, and non-recurring experience.

Specifically, every community will have the capacity to:

1. Quickly identify and engage people at-risk of and experiencing homelessness.

2. Intervene to prevent the loss of housing and divert people from entering the homelessness services system.

3. Provide immediate access to shelter and crisis services, without barriers to entry, while permanent stable housing and appropriate supports are being secured.

4. When homelessness does occur, quickly connect people to housing assistance and services—tailored to their unique needs and strengths—to help them achieve and maintain stable housing.

U.S. CRITERIA FOR ENDING VETERAN HOMELESSNESS [15]

1. The community has identified all veterans experiencing homelessness.
2. The community provides shelter immediately to any veteran experiencing unsheltered homelessness who wants it.
3. The community only provides service-intensive transitional housing in limited instances.
4. The community has capacity to assist veterans to swiftly move into permanent housing.
5. The community has resources, plans, and system capacity in place should any veteran become homeless or be at risk of homelessness in the future.

U.S. BENCHMARKS FOR ENDING VETERAN HOMELESSNESS

1. CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS AMONG VETERANS HAS BEEN ENDED.

- No Veterans experiencing chronic homelessness, with exception of (1) any Veterans identified, offered permanent housing intervention, but not yet accepted or entered housing, and (2) any Veterans offered permanent housing intervention but chose service-intensive transitional housing prior to permanent housing.
- Continued outreach to Veterans experiencing chronic homelessness that have not yet accepted permanent housing intervention offer.
- Continue to offer permanent housing intervention at least once every two weeks.

2. VETERANS HAVE QUICK ACCESS TO PERMANENT HOUSING.

- Average time identification to permanent housing entry 90 days or less among all Vets who entered permanent housing in past three months.
- Two exceptions/exclusions: (1) Veterans identified and offered permanent housing intervention, but not initially accepted offer, average only includes time from permanent housing intervention acceptance until permanent housing move-in, and (2) Veterans offered permanent housing intervention but chose to enter service-intensive transitional housing prior to moving to permanent housing.
- Should also take into account, and may need to be tailored based on, local housing market conditions.

3. THE COMMUNITY HAS SUFFICIENT PERMANENT HOUSING CAPACITY.

- Number of Veterans moving into permanent housing is greater than or equal to number entering homelessness during continuous 90-day period preceding benchmark measurement.

4. THE COMMUNITY IS COMMITTED TO HOUSING FIRST AND PROVIDES SERVICE-INTENSIVE TRANSITIONAL HOUSING TO VETERANS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS ONLY IN LIMITED INSTANCES.

- Number of Veterans entering service-intensive transitional housing is less than number entering homelessness during continuous 90-day period preceding benchmark measurement.
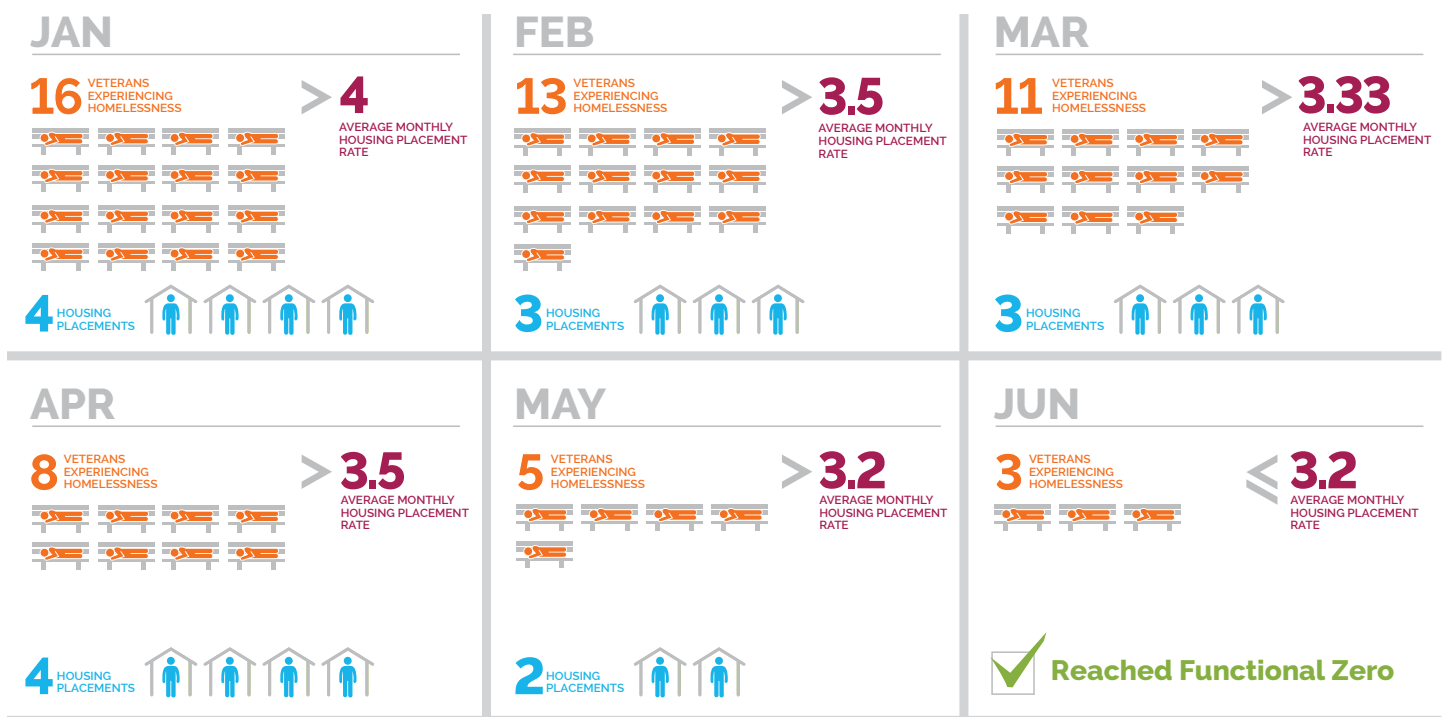
[13] United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness (2015), p.10, https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/USICH_OpeningDoors_Amendment2015_FINAL.pdf

[14] United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness (2015), p.10, https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/USICH_OpeningDoors_Amendment2015_FINAL.pdf

[15] The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, Achieving the Goal of Ending Veteran Homelessness: Criteria and Benchmarks (2015), https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Achieving_the_Goal_Ending_Veteran_Homelessness_v3_10_01_15.pdf

Functional Zero, then, would mean that a community has effectively structured its local homeless-serving system to meet incoming demand with effectiveness and efficiency and has an adequate supply of housing to meet the demands. An illustrative example comes from Common Ground's 100K Homes Campaign definition of Functional Zero for ending chronic and veterans' homelessness, which states: [16]

At any point in time, the number of veterans experiencing sheltered and unsheltered homelessness in a community will be no greater than the average monthly housing placement rate for veterans experiencing homelessness in that community.

JAN

16 VETERANS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS > **4** AVERAGE MONTHLY HOUSING PLACEMENT RATE

4 HOUSING PLACEMENTS

FEB

13 VETERANS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS > **3.5** AVERAGE MONTHLY HOUSING PLACEMENT RATE

3 HOUSING PLACEMENTS

MAR

11 VETERANS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS > **3.33** AVERAGE MONTHLY HOUSING PLACEMENT RATE

3 HOUSING PLACEMENTS

APR

8 VETERANS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS > **3.5** AVERAGE MONTHLY HOUSING PLACEMENT RATE

4 HOUSING PLACEMENTS

MAY

5 VETERANS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS > **3.2** AVERAGE MONTHLY HOUSING PLACEMENT RATE

2 HOUSING PLACEMENTS

JUN

3 VETERANS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS < **3.2** AVERAGE MONTHLY HOUSING PLACEMENT RATE

✓ **Reached Functional Zero**

Number of Veterans Experiencing Homelessness < **Average Monthly Veteran Housing Placement Rate** = **Functional Zero**

At any point in time, the number of veterans experiencing homelessness in a community will be no greater than that community's average monthly housing placement rate for veterans.

COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS cmtysolutions.org

Figure 1 100K Homes Functional Zero Definition

The four U.S state level homelessness plans analyzed all identified their goal of ending homelessness, though the objectives included were frequently broad and did not delve into implementation details or specify targets and performance measures. At the local level, some plans provided more concrete examples of how an end to homelessness is defined. For example, Seattle/King County's plan lays out expectations that by the end of 2014: [17]

- Homelessness will be virtually ended;
- People who enter into homelessness will have immediate access to housing with appropriate supports;
- Downsized outreach and emergency services will continue to aid individuals and families who become homeless, but stays in the system will be short; and
- There will be no need for tent cities or encampments.

[16] Community Solutions, What Does It Mean to End (and Prove You've Ended) Veteran Homelessness? (2016), https://cmtysolutions.org/blog/what-does-it-mean-end-and-prove-you%E2%80%99ve-ended-veteran-homelessness

[17] Committee to End Homelessness King County, A Roof Over Every Bed in King County: Our Community's Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness (2005), p.3-4, http://www.commerce.wa.gov/Documents/Local-Plan-King-Plan.pdf

The majority of the local ten-year plans include specific goals, targets, and performance measures. However, these targets range in their level of specificity. As a result, some of the targets provide little indication of what outcomes the community will deem as a success. For example, as a part of Oakland County's plan, there is a specific focus on family homelessness: [18]

> *"The length of homelessness experienced by families will be reduced through prompt, effective, and respectful response, delivered by a continuum of providers dictated by family needs."*

Even in communities recognized for making progress in reducing homelessness, such as Salt Lake City, plans often feature vague targets, making it difficult to determine what their benchmark for success is and therefore their definition of ending homelessness. For example, under Salt Lake City's housing strategy, the plan stipulates that the goal is to: [19]

> *"Provid[e] suitable housing surrounded by appropriate supportive services [to] help meet the basic human need of shelter."*

To accomplish this, several steps are laid out, such as: increasing housing opportunities, the number of housing units for the chronically homeless, and the number of housing vouchers and subsidies. This, once again, leaves us wondering what exactly constitutes an increase and how much of an increase is ideal. However, despite this, Salt Lake City's plan does include specific targets in some instances. For example, the plan indicates that one important step is to rapidly re-house first time shelter users within 90 days of becoming homeless. The plan also includes clear-cut goals for reducing homelessness, which was not seen in many of the plans analyzed: [20]

> *"The goal is to reduce the number of homeless persons on the street by 25 percent in five years, 50 percent in eight years and by 95 percent in 10 years."*

As in the case of Canadian plans, what becomes evident from the U.S. analysis is that diverse approaches and measures to defining an end to homelessness are used despite recent efforts nationally to create consistency. In a study by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, which looked into content patterns between community plans to end homelessness, it was found that only 18% of plans included numeric outcomes. The study concluded "it remains to be seen how successful 10-year plans will be without these key implementation elements."[21]

[18] Oakland County Taskforce on Homelessness & Affordable Housing, Mission Possible: Oakland County's Community Plan to End Homelessness (2006), p.8, http://www.thecampaigntoendhomelessness.org/Portals/0/pdfs/10YrPln_Reg8_OaklandCo.pdf

[19] Salt Lake County Council of Governments, New Vision New Opportunities: Salt Lake County Ten Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness (2006), p.13, http://www.slco.org/crd/pdf/TenYearPlanToEndChro.pdf

[20] ibid, p.12

[21] National Alliance to End Homelessness, A Shifting Focus: What's New in Community Plans to End Homelessness (2009), p.4, http://www.endhomelessness.org/page/-/files/8fb05553670fae3f64_9km6ibuf7.pdf

EUROPE

Unlike their North American counterparts, European plans are not as explicitly focused on ending homelessness; rather, most propose reducing homelessness and social exclusion. In most cases the goals, targets, performance indicators, and objectives set out are also focused on the homeless-serving system's response, while some are focused on discharge practices from public systems.

Denmark's plan to reduce homelessness sets out four objectives: [22]

- No citizen should live a life on the street;

- Young people should not stay at care homes, but must be offered alternative solutions;

- Periods of accommodation in care home or shelter should last no longer than 3-4 months for citizens who are prepared to move into their own homes with the necessary support; and

- Release from prison or discharge from courses or treatment or hospitals must presuppose than an accommodation solution is in place.

Denmark's plan opts to let municipalities set their own goals, in a manner similar to Canada and the U.S. For example, as outlined in the national plan, Copenhagen and Aarhus have different targets for the goal that "No citizen should live a life on the street": a 60% and 85% reduction in street homelessness by 2012, respectively.

Norway's homelessness plan seeks to prevent and combat homelessness via three primary objectives and five targets: [23]

1. COMBAT HOMELESSNESS
a. The number of eviction notices shall be reduced by 50 percent and the number of evictions by 30 percent
b. No one shall have to spend time in temporary accommodation upon release from prison
c. No one shall have to spend time in temporary accommodation upon discharge from an institution

2. HELP IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF OVERNIGHT SHELTERS
a. No one shall be offered overnight shelter without a quality agreement

3. HELP THE HOMELESS TO QUICKLY OBTAIN AN OFFER OF LONG-TERM HOUSING
a. No on shall stay more than 3 months in temporary accommodation provisions

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[22] Ministry of Interior and Social Affairs, The Government's Homelessness Strategy: A Strategy to Reduce Homelessness in Denmark 2009-2012 (2009), p.6, http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?rubrique143

[23] Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, The Pathway to a Permanent Home: Strategy to prevent and combat homelessness (2006), p.5, http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?rubrique143

Norway, like Denmark, gives municipalities a significant degree of autonomy to determine their goals and strategies; the national plan outlines six strategies that are essential to reducing homelessness: [24]

1. Eviction prevention;
2. Create a pathway to housing for released convicts;
3. Create a pathway to housing for people released from 'treatment institutions';
4. Ensure higher quality of overnight stays for those who need temporary accommodation;
5. Help the homeless to quickly secure housing of their own; and
6. Developing an overview of the scope of homelessness.

England stands out among the European countries for its explicit goal to end all rough sleeping, as laid out in *Vision to end rough sleeping: No Second Night Out nationwide.* Six priority areas ('Commitments') are outlined in the plan with the aim of ensuring that those "who does spend a night sleeping rough anywhere in the country is immediately helped off the streets". [25]

- Commitment 1: Helping people off the streets;
- Commitment 2: Helping people to access health care;
- Commitment 3: Helping people into work;
- Commitment 4: Reducing bureaucratic burdens;
- Commitment 5: Increasing local over investment in services; and
- Commitment 6: Devolving responsibility for tackling homelessness.

Ireland's homeless plan, *The Way Home*, vision is to: [26]

- Eliminate long-term homelessness (i.e. the occupation of emergency accommodation for longer than 6 months) and the need for people to sleep rough;
- Minimize the risk of a person becoming homeless through effective preventative policies and services; and
- Ensure that when homelessness does occur it is short term and that people who are homeless are assisted into appropriate long term housing

This vision represents the only instance where there is a hybrid definition. That is, where both a functional and an absolute approach to ending homelessness is present in a single plan. This becomes clearer when the plan outlines the six strategic aims that include concerns about the effectiveness of the homeless service system and the desire to outright eliminate rough sleeping and long-term homelessness.

[24] ibid

[25] Department for Communities and Local Government, Vision to end rough sleeping: No Second Night Out nationwide (2011), p.9-11, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6261/1939099.pdf

[26] Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government, The Way Home: A Strategy to Address Adult Homelessness in Ireland 2008-2013 (2008), http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownLoad,18192,en.pdf

AUSTRALIA

In 2008, the Australian government created a plan to reduce homelessness across the country. The long-term goals, as stated in *The Road Home — A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness,* are to halve overall homelessness and offer support accommodation to all rough sleepers who need it by 2020. [27]

Notwithstanding the fact that Australia's goal is to reduce homelessness rather than end it, it is evident that the plan's primary concern is to create a more effective homeless-serving system. This is perhaps best demonstrated through the plan's three overarching strategies:

1. *Turning off the tap*: services will intervene early to prevent homelessness;

2. *Improving and expanding services*: services will be more connected and responsive to achieve sustainable housing, improve economic and social participation and end homelessness for their clients; and

3. *Breaking the cycle*: people who become homeless will move quickly through the crisis system to stable housing with the support they need so that homelessness does not recur.

A similar concern for the effectiveness of the homelessness system is also seen in the New South Wales plan. [28] In fact, the plan adopts the three aforementioned strategies outlined in the national plan.

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[27] Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness (2008), p.17, http://www.cshisc.com.au/media/150400/the_road_home.pdf

[28] Ministry of Housing, A Way Home: Reducing Homelessness in NSW (2009), http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/324704/NSWHomelessnessActionPlan.pdf

DISCUSSION

As is evident from the analysis above, most documents reviewed developed implicit definitions of ending homelessness, with little consistency across jurisdictions. Most often, an implied definition of homelessness following the Functional Zero approach was found in the use of targets, benchmarks or other performance measures that define progress. Quantitative goals, indicators, and targets outlined focused on measuring the efficiency and effectiveness of local homeless systems in addressing and reducing defined level of need.

The most commonly cited measures concerned:

- Number of program and housing units available against estimated demand.
- Length of stay in shelter/street.
- Time between identification or 'registry' and placement in housing.
- Numbers of homeless persons (point-in-time count, annual shelter /transitional housing utilization).
- Percent who successfully exit to permanent housing.
- Percent of those rehoused who return to homelessness.
- Number of net new homeless in system from at risk population.
- Housing retention rates among rehoused clients.

In a small number of cases, communities provided explicit definitions typically focused on one or two specific measures, such as length of stay in shelter (e.g. Medicine Hat, Red Deer, Calgary). Other efforts to define an end to homelessness articulated a broad, aspirational vision, and values describing the characteristics of the ideal state of the local system response.

In the absence of consistent definitions, most documents offered a range of performance indicators to describe progress, though there was little consistency with regard to specific targets and goals. For example, plans did not have aligned targets for the maximum length of time someone can be homeless. In addition, there was a range in the targets. Ottawa, for example, has indicated the goal of reducing emergency shelters stays to 30 days or less. In comparison, Edmonton outlined in their plan their ambition to reduce the average length of emergency shelter stays to seven days or less.

Reflecting on the few explicit definitions of ending homelessness and the implicit definitions crafted through goals, targets, performance indicators and objectives, it is apparent that all plans have adopted some definition of Functional Zero. That is to say, no plan claims to fully and permanently end all homelessness. Rather, plans aim to create a system that is effective and efficient in addressing homelessness as they work towards Absolute Zero.

No plan claims to fully and permanently end all homelessness. Rather, plans aim to create a system that is effective and efficient in addressing homelessness as they work towards Absolute Zero

An important implied assumption across these definitions and their complementing measures is that the focus of our efforts is on effectively managing the supply-demand dynamic of the local homeless-serving system itself. In other words, an end to homelessness is connected to the effective performance of local services, balancing client needs with quality and efficient responses. The measures proposed track the flow into the homeless system and its capacity to respond to shifting demand with diverse interventions (prevention, emergency shelter, outreach, Housing First, etc.). They further focus on the workings of the homeless-serving system itself and how quickly it is able assess clients for appropriate intervention, move them into housing with supports, and to what effect over the long term. In a number of jurisdictions, the goal of increasing the supply of affordable housing is included in plans to address homelessness, though in practice there are challenges to aligning the homeless-serving and social housing systems where they are not integrated.

While there is nothing wrong per se with this implied focus, making it the sole foundation behind a national definition of Functional Zero would fall short on several fronts, particularly evident when we look to the perspectives of those with lived experience.

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE LENS

As mentioned, interviews with a small sample (n=6) of persons with lived experience were conducted to gauge perspectives on the notion of ending homelessness and common definitions used in current initiatives (See Appendix 3 for the interview guide). Ethics clearance was obtained from the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee (HPRC) at York University.

By no means are these findings exhaustive or representative of the diversity of those with lived experience; rather, the intent was to gauge possible issues and emerging directions that could be expanded in a broader consultation on defining an end to homelessness.

METHODS & LIMITATIONS

With the assistance of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, persons with lived experience were identified and contacted to inquire about participation in an interview. In total, 11 persons with lived experienced were contacted, and of those, six were ultimately interviewed. All interviews were less than one-hour long and questions were designed to capture what participants thought the end of homelessness means both for themselves specifically, and more broadly (e.g. within Canada). However, due to the semi-structured format of the interviews, the questions asked—while similar in content—often differed in both delivery and wording. To ensure the integrity of the notes, each interview was captured via audio recording and transcribed.

The table below summarizes the demographic characteristics of the participants to further contextualize findings. Note that none of the interviewees were homeless at the time of the interviews; a range of past homelessness experience was reported.

Demographic Characteristics	# of Participants (n=6)
Age (at time of interview)	–
< 18	0
> 18	6
Gender	–
Male	2
Female	3
Other	1
Cumulative duration of homelessness	–
Less than 1 year	2
Between 1 and 3 years	1
More than 3 years	3

Table 3 Interviewee Demographics

The results of the interviews have several methodological limitations. The first is that due to a small sample (n=6), the findings are not representative of the larger homeless population. Most notable is the absence of homeless youth from the survey, though two participants experienced homelessness as adolescents. A second methodological limitation is that all participant, to a greater or lesser extent, are involved in some form of homelessness work, whether it be advocacy, consultation, or working in the field. This may further skew findings because those without specialized knowledge were not included in the interviews. Despite these limitations, the findings are still important as they contextualize the conversation around ending homelessness.

EMERGING THEMES

The interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically to deduce recurring patterns. Quotes that particularly highlighted the theme were used to provide a richer understanding of participant perspectives. In order to determine whether the findings were in fact main themes, these were examined by the researchers. For the purposes of this working paper, we are highlighting the themes relevant to participants' perspective on a definition of an end to homelessness.

Primarily, the interviewees highlighted that access to accessible, secure, and affordable housing was essential to ending homelessness at a personal and broader social level. Secondly, they stressed that ending homelessness is more than housing, as effort are needed to reduce social exclusion and ensure those with lived experience are part of inclusive communities.

ACCESSIBLE, SECURE, AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING.

When asked the question, "What would Canada look like when we have ended homelessness?" or a variation thereof, several participants (number) stressed the need for a sufficient supply of affordable and social housing. A key element interviewees considered as crucial to ending homelessness was that homeless persons both are, and feel, a sense of tenure and stability in their housing situation. Moreover, participants mentioned that financial sustainability (e.g. being able to afford their housing) was important to changing feelings about the precariousness of their housing situation.

Five of the six participants stressed that feelings of insecurity in or around their house could prevent them from feeling like they have a permanent home. For example, one participant disclosed that they had to leave their apartment because they did not feel safe due to a conflict with a neighbour (Participant 1).

> **Q:** What do you think ending homelessness means?
>
> **Wayne:** A home to me is... 1. A place in which I can entertain family and friends, consisting of a living room, kitchen, bathroom, and bedroom. 2. A secure, safe place without fear of having to move. And 3. A affordable place, that reflects my income support for shelter allowance.
>
> **Q:** When did you no longer consider yourself homeless?
>
> **Margret:** When I got a safe apartment... when I knew I could go to my door without getting attacked.

The accessibility and suitability of housing was an issue that was brought up by several participants. If a housing unit is either inaccessible or unsuitable, then persons inhabiting those units will not feel like their homelessness has ended.

MORE THAN HOUSING.

Three of the participants described the degree to which people are able to have a sense of control over their housing. As one participant put it, the level of surveillance and restrictions placed on people with prior experiences of homelessness can damage their sense of community; forced to decide between community (e.g. friends) and social isolation. As a consequence, some leave their housing to return to the streets.

> **Q:** What are your thoughts on typical performance indicators and targets such as the swiftness of re-housing?

> **Alice:** … if it is just about getting people into a place where there are walls than… it's not going to make a lot of difference. [People] are going to keep going back out [into homelessness] because there has to be community building.

Several participants (n=4) described homelessness in relation to social exclusion, marked by marginalization on a variety of levels (e.g. cultural, technological, social, etc.). Without resolving social exclusion, as one Participant proposes, homelessness will never be eliminated.

> **Q:** So for yourself, does ending homelessness mean that everyone has a house? Or it is more than housing?

> Janice: To me it's more than housing because a lot of people struggle with abuse backgrounds, which causes them to commit crimes and feel unsafe in their own place. So if we take care of underlying issues—whether it's abuse or mental health issues, addictions—then we can actually get towards better housing and ending homelessness.

What is evident from these interviews, albeit limited, is that those with lived experience do not define an end to homelessness in terms of targets and performance measures. In some ways, this is obvious; they look to their experience and that of their social networks to develop an understanding of what an end to homelessness would mean to them personally. Yet, to date, our approaches to defining an end to homelessness have excluded such perspectives. What use is building an effective homeless-serving system with lengths of stay in shelter of less than 30 or 21 or seven days, if those we serve report we have not ended their homelessness? There has to be congruence between the indicators we measure and the lived experience perspective.

Further consultations with diverse (age, gender, family composition, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.) individuals with lived experience are needed to confirm their perspectives on the proposed definition.

DEFINING FUNCTIONAL ZERO

We reiterate that we consider working towards Functional Zero as progress towards Absolute Zero, rather than considering these concepts in binary opposition. Our proposed definition of Functional Zero is conceptualized within a socio-ecological model that distinguishes the varying levels at which homelessness needs to be addressed. These represent networks of interactions across different, interdependent dimensions.

We need to consider structural/systemic, as well and individual and relational factors, which interact with one another in complex ways and impact an individual's housing situation. Structural and systemic factors include societal and policy-based issues such as poverty, the housing market, and trends in unemployment. Individual factors include mental illness, addictions and health difficulties, etc. The manifestation of these factors will also depend on the particular lifecycle stage (youth, senior, family) and the structural context at play.

We are proposing that to achieve Functional Zero, standards and performance measures are needed across three key dimensions depicted in the following diagram to account for these complex interplays.

The examination of varying forms of homelessness using the socio-ecological model points to interventions across levels of society rather than restricting these to the individual or the homeless-serving system, or the immediate networks of service providers working to address homelessness in a particular community. It would be inadequate to focus on shifting individual behaviours or within families in order to decrease the incidence of homelessness.

A comprehensive strategy that tackles the structural/systemic, community, institutional, interpersonal and individual causes is required. This recognizes the boundaries of homeless-serving system are but one element in the dynamics involved in homelessness – as much focus as we place on its workings, its impact is limited.

Key public systems, particularly health, corrections, and child protection, are well known to have key roles in mitigating or perpetuating homelessness. Further, broader policies and attitudes in society influence such factors as the supply of housing and migration, which in turn impact inflows and demand at the community level. It is unrealistic to expect that a city's homeless-serving system can manage such external drivers at the macro-economic level, though it may have the ability to exercise some degree of influence. Nonetheless, an end to homelessness requires changes across these levels, even if we are limited from a data perspective on local communities' homeless response for now.

3. PUBLIC SYSTEMS

2. HOMELESS-SERVING SYSTEM

1. LIVED EXPERIENCE

Table 4 Dimensions of Functional Zero

In developing the draft definition of Functional Zero, standards and performance measures are needed across the following three inter-related dimensions:

DIMENSION 1

LIVED EXPERIENCE

Community member who interacts with homeless system and other community systems.

First and foremost, an end to homelessness must resonate for those experiencing homeless and housing instability. If the way we define and measure Functional Zero falls short of the on-the ground realities of those experiencing homelessness, then we are on the wrong track.

We have to ensure the voices of those with lived experience are included in an assessment of whether or not progress towards ending homelessness is congruent with on-the-ground perspectives. Lived experience should confirm whether:

- The homeless-serving system is performing as designed; efficiently and effectively meeting the needs of those it serves;
- The levels of service and housing accessibility, sustainability, affordability, safety, and security of tenure are appropriately meeting the needs of those at risk of or experiencing homelessness;
- Those at risk of or experiencing homelessness have an enhanced sense of social inclusion with positive participation in community activities, sense of belonging, connection with friends and family.
- Those at risk of or experiencing homelessness access appropriate supports within and outside the homeless-serving system (housing, addiction, trauma, mental and physical health issues, employment, education, etc.).

DIMENSION 2

HOMELESS SERVING-SYSTEM

Homeless serving-system partners define and operationalize a high functioning, optimized system to meet community need.

A definition of Functional Zero must complement measurable, quantitative indicators of progress, as well as qualitative aspects of well-functioning, optimized homeless-serving systems that are integrated with public systems and supported by policy direction and adequate resources.

There is no doubt that a well-functioning system of care focused on ending homelessness, with performance measures and quality assurance standards, can make significant strides towards ending homelessness. Ideally, the lived experience perspective will confirm the trends performance metrics uncover, though this cannot be assumed.

A Functional Zero definition should apply across the populations of those at risk of or experiencing homelessness, rather than limiting efforts to particular sub-populations, such as veterans, youth, chronically homeless, etc. The definition would therefore be aligned with the Canadian Definition of Homelessness (see Appendix 4). This approach considers how well our systems of care perform, not just in rehousing those experiencing homelessness, but how well we prevent homelessness from occurring in the first place or from recurring.

DIMENSION 3

PUBLIC SYSTEMS

Government and other public systems embrace value of housing stability and access to housing crisis intervention for community members.

Lastly, without public system and government support and alignment with the goal of ending homelessness, progress by an efficient homeless-serving system will be limited. An end to homelessness involves an assessment of the level of integration between the homeless-serving system and other key public systems (corrections, child intervention, health, social housing, education, etc.) to meet common objectives.

The definition should include methods and metrics to assess the homeless-serving system response integration with other key public systems regarding such items as:

- Adequate supply of safe, appropriate, affordable housing.
- Discharging practices from public systems that promote housing stability.
- Not criminalizing homelessness.
- Alignment of public systems at policy and service delivery levels to identify and effectively intervene with those at risk of or experiencing homelessness.
- Level of access to appropriate mainstream services by homeless/at risk persons.
- Public systems capacity to develop preventative approaches that mitigate homelessness risk.

PROPOSED FUNCTIONAL ZERO END STANDARDS & MEASURES

The draft standards and performance measures below are envisioned as a starting point for dialogue and will be refined on a go-forward basis. A community can describe itself as having achieved Functional Zero with respect to homelessness when it has met the criteria outlined below, using a consistent verification process.

CRITERIA	VERIFICATION SOURCES
Dimension 1: Lived Experience	

1. Program and housing participants served by homeless-serving system (including shelter, transitional housing, Housing First etc. programs) report high satisfaction regarding:
 	
   a. Housing/shelter quality, security of tenure affordability and safety;
   b. case management services received;
   c. access to appropriate supports to address diverse needs within homeless system & mainstream public systems (addiction, trauma, mental and physical health issues, employment, education, etc.);
   d. process of referral and intake into programs, shelters, housing;
   e. housing placement, stabilization and aftercare supports;
   f. perception of quality of life, including sense of belonging, participation in community activities, connection with friends and family.
 	
2. Evidence of systematic and effective inclusion of those with lived experience in community coordination efforts and decision-making to develop and deliver services in the homeless-serving system.
	▪ Program participant surveys/interviews
	▪ Lived experience consultations (surveys, focus groups, interviews, advisory groups)
	▪ System/program-level data analysis (HIFIS, PIT Count, HMIS, program/system evaluations)
	▪ System of care site visits
	▪ Stakeholder consultations
	▪ Service standards assessments

Dimension 2: Homeless-Serving System	
3. Total number of unsheltered persons and emergency sheltered as consistently decreased by a minimum of 25% over past 3 years. 4. Total number of unsheltered persons is no greater than 10 on any given night in large centres, and 0 in rural communities less than 15,000. 5. All unsheltered persons in a community are engaged with services and have been offered low-barrier shelter and housing at least every two weeks. 6. Length of stay in emergency shelter/unsheltered is less than 10 days on average with a maximum of 60 days for any one individual during course of the year. This performance is maintained for a minimum of 12 months. 7. Number moving into permanent housing is greater than or equal to number entering homeless-serving system during continuous 90-day period preceding benchmark measurement. This performance is maintained for a minimum of 1 year. 8. No more than 5% of those who exit programs after receiving supports (rapid rehousing, Housing First, supportive housing programs) return to homelessness within 12 months. 9. Prevention services are in place to divert those at imminent risk of homelessness (as defined by HPS [29]); a 25% reduction over past 3 years in number of homeless persons in emergency shelter and transitional housing/outreach with no previous homelessness experience. 10. Community planning and service delivery is highly coordinated using a systems approach that includes coordinated entry, assessment, formal standards of care, formal integration strategies with public systems, performance management and funding allocation process.	▪ System/program-level data analysis (HIFIS, PIT Count, HMIS, program/system evaluations) ▪ System of care site visits ▪ Stakeholder consultations ▪ Service standards assessments
Dimension 3: Public Systems	
11. Community has consistently reduced the percent of those entering the homeless-serving system from other public systems (e.g., child protection; corrections; inpatient treatment etc.); at minimum, those entering the homeless-serving system from institutions, or who have had institutional stays in the past 12 months, has seen a minimum of 25% reduction over 3 years. 12. Government commits that no one should be forced to live on streets and provides sufficient resources to meet emergency shelter demand. 13. Adequate affordable housing supply is in place and accessible to meet demand of those at imminent risk of homelessness. 14. Adequate systems and supports for young people (13-24) who have to flee the homes of caregivers and may be provisionally accommodated, emergency sheltered/unsheltered, get supports to help them either return safely home or move into their own accommodation (with supports) in a safe and planned way. 15. Formalized coordination efforts are in place with public systems to ensure appropriate referrals, timely access to services/supports. This includes public systems conducting standardized screening for housing status/assistance needs and having in place standardized protocols for addressing needs of people who are homeless or at risk. 16. Diverse public and private funding sources are committed to maintain service delivery levels to sustain high functioning system. 17. Evidence of high levels of funding and policy coordination across government in community's jurisdiction to ensure ending homelessness objectives are supported. 18. City laws do not criminalize people who are unsheltered.	▪ Public and private investment in system. ▪ Public system and policy stakeholders' interviews/focus groups; ▪ Policy, procedural and funding analysis ▪ System integration analyses; ▪ Program participant surveys/interviews ▪ Lived experience consultations (surveys, focus groups, interviews, advisory groups) ▪ System/program-level data analysis ▪ System of care site visits ▪ Stakeholder consultations

[29] "Populations at imminent risk of homelessness are defined as individuals or families whose current housing situation end in the near future (i.e. within two months) and for whom no subsequent residence has been identified. These individuals are unable to secure permanent housing because they do not have sufficient resources or support networks immediately available to prevent them from moving to an emergency shelter or a public or private place not meant for human habitation."

Employment and Social Development Canada, Homelessness Partnering Strategy Directives 2014-2019,
Available online: http://www.esdc.gc.ca/eng/communities/homelessness/funding/directives.shtml

CONCLUSION

This paper aimed to ground a proposed definition of Functional Zero for Canada in existing international approaches and a lived experience lens. Over the course of 2016, this paper will be the basis for consultations across the country with key stakeholders to develop a finalized definition to be endorsed by COH, CAEH and other partners.

Future work will expand on implementation aspects, including the verification process and data collection tools, as well as capacity building for communities. Adaptations of the definitions for key groups, including youth and Indigenous Peoples, will also be explored.

Lastly, there is a need to develop a consistent process for validating communities' progress towards Functional Zero, which can include community self-assessment, review panels, site visits, independent data collection/analysis, etc. Capacity building and supports would need to be in place for communities to adopt and implement the definition in practice.

We will need to identify acceptable sources of data to validate community progress, test the proposed approach with pilot communities and refine on an ongoing basis. Funders will have to be engaged to reinforce the definition across diverse investments. Notably, developing longer-term strategies to integrate the definition, validation process, and capacity building across public systems will be needed to ensure this exercise is not limited to the bounds of homeless-serving systems.

APPENDIX 1
PLANS REVIEWED

Municipality	Plan
Ontario	Brantford-Brant Housing Stability Plan 2014 to 2024 (2014)
Durham Region	At Home in Durham: Durham Region Housing Plan 2014-2024 (2014)
Hamilton	Everyone has a home… Home is the foundation: Hamilton's Housing & Homelessness Action Plan (2013)
Kingston	10-Year Municipal Housing and Homelessness Plan in the City of Kingston and the County of Frontenac (2013)
London	Homelessness Prevention and Housing Plan 2010-2024 (2013)
Niagara Region	A Home For All: Niagara's 10-year community action plan to help people find and keep housing (2013)
District of Nipissing	A Place to Call Home: Nipissing District 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan 2014-2024 (2013)
Ottawa	A Home For Everyone: Our Ten Year Plan 2014-2024 (2013)
Peel Region	Peel's Housing and Homelessness Plan: A Community Strategy 2014-2024 (2013)
Peterborough	Peterborough 10-year housing & homelessness Plan: Action Plan 2014-2018 (2013)
The District of Thunder Bay	Under One Roof: A Housing and Homelessness Plan 2014-2024 (2014)
Toronto	Housing Opportunities Toronto: An Affordable Housing Action Plan 2010-2020 (2009)
–	Housing Stability Service Planning Framework 2014-2019 (2013)
Waterloo Region	Waterloo Region's Housing Action Plan – 2014-2024 (2013)
Windsor Essex	Windsor Essex Housing and Homelessness Plan (2014)
York Region	Housing Solutions: A place for everyone – York Region 10-Year Housing Plan (2014)
Alberta	
Calgary	Calgary's Updated Plan to End Homelessness: People First in Housing First (2015)
Edmonton	A Place to Call Home: Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness (2009)
Grande Prairie	Home is where one starts from: Grande Prairie's Multi-year Plan to End Homelessness 2009-2014 (2009)
Lethbridge	"Bringing Lethbridge Home": 5 Year Community Plan to End Homelessness 2009-2014 (2009)
Medicine Hat	At Home in Medicine Hat: Our Plan to End Homelessness (2014)
Red Deer	Everyone's Home: Red Deer's Give Year Plan to End Homelessness 2014-2018 (2014)
Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo	Heading Home: The Right Thing to Do – 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness 2010-2020 (2010)
British Columbia	
Kamloops	Kamloops Homelessness Action Plan (2010)
Surrey	Master Plan for Housing the Homeless in Surry (2013)
Vancouver	Vancouver's Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2012-2021 (2011)
Victoria	Solving Homelessness in British Columbia's Capital Region: A Community Plan (2012)
Saskatchewan	
Saskatoon	The Saskatoon Housing and Homelessness Plan 2011-2014 (2011)
Manitoba	
Winnipeg	The Plan to End Homelessness in Winnipeg (2014)

Table 2 – Provincial Plans

Province	Plan
Alberta	A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years (2008)
British Columbia	Housing Matters BC - Housing Strategy for British Columbia: A Foundation for Strong Communities (2014)
Manitoba	Strong Communities: An Action Plan (2011)
New Brunswick	Hope is a Home: New Brunswick's Housing Strategy (2010)
Ontario	Building Foundations: Building Futures – Ontario's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy (2010)
–	Ontario Housing Policy Statement (Current)
–	Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CPHI): Program Guidelines (2012)
Saskatchewan	The Saskatchewan Advantage Housing Plan (2011)

THE UNITED STATES
Table 3 – Municipal/Local Plans

Municipality	Plan
Arlington County, Virginia	A Passageway Home: A 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Arlington County, Virginia (2006)
Cape Fear Region, North Carolina	The Street is No Place to Live: Ten Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness and in the Cape Fear Region (2008)
Houston, Texas	Strategy Plan to Address Homelessness Houston/Harris County (2006)
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	Philadelphia's Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness: Creating Homes, Strengthening Communities, and Improving Systems (2005)
Portland, Oregon	Home Again: A 10-year plan to end homeless in Portland and Multnomah County (2004)
Oakland County, Michigan	Mission Possible: Oakland County's Community Plan to End Homelessness (2006)
Missoula, Montana	Reaching Home: Missoula's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness 2012-2022 (2012)
New Orleans, Louisiana	Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness (2011)
Salt Lake City, Utah	New Vision New Opportunities: Salt Lake County Ten Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness (2006)
Seattle/King County, Washington	A Roof Over Every Bed in King County: Our Community's Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness (2006)

Table 4 – State Plans

State	Plan
Louisiana	State of Louisiana Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness: The Road to Supportive Housing (2009)
Oregon	A Home for Hope: A 10-year plan to end homelessness in Oregon (2008)
Texas	Annual Report and Pathways Home Addendum (2012)
Utah	Utah's Plan to End Chronic Homelessness and Reduce Overall Homelessness by 2014 (2008)

EUROPE

Table 5 – European Plans

Country	Municipality	Plan
Denmark	–	The Government's Homelessness Strategy: A Strategy to Reduce Homelessness in Denmark (2009)
England	–	Vision to end rough sleeping: No Second Night Out nationwide (2011)
Ireland	–	The Way Home: A Strategy to Address Adult Homelessness in Ireland 2008-2013 (2008)
–	–	Homeless Strategy National Implementation Plan (2008)
–	Dublin	Sustaining Dublin's Pathway to Home: The Homeless Action Plan for Dublin, 2014 to 2016 (2013)
Norway	–	The Pathway to a Permanent Home: Strategy to prevent and combat homelessness (2006)
Scotland	Glasgow	Strategy for Preventing and Alleviating Homelessness in Glasgow 2009-2012 (2008)
Sweden	–	Homelessness: Multiple faces, Multiple Responsibilities – A strategy to combat homelessness and exclusion from the housing market (2007)

AUSTRALIA

Table 6 – Australian Plans

Country	Province/ Municipality	Plan
Australia	–	The Road Home – A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness (2008)
–	New South Wales	A Way Home: Reducing Homelessness in NSW – NSW Homelessness Action Plan 2009-2014 (2009)

APPENDIX 2
HPS MEASUREMENT

INDICATOR	TARGETS	DATE TO ACHIEVE	SOURCE
SYSTEM-LEVEL INDICATORS			
National Indicators			
Estimated annual number of unique individuals using emergency shelters	N/A	N/A	NHIS
Estimated number of shelter users that are chronically homeless (proxy = number of clients with 180 or more nights in shelter) ⚠	Proposed reduction of 20%	2017-18	NHIS
Estimated number of shelter users that are episodically homeless (proxy = number of clients with 3 or more episodes of homelessness) ⚠	Proposed reduction of 20%	2017-18	NHIS
Estimated number of people living on the street (sleeping rough)	Proposed reduction of 20%	2017-18	PiT Count
Reduction in the usage of emergency shelters, as measured by number of 'bednights' utilised	15%	2017-18	NHIS
Community Indicators			
Percentage of Communities that have demonstrated a reduction in homelessness through their point-in-time count	60%	2017-18	PiT Count
Amount invested by external partners for every dollar invested by the HPS ⚠	$1.50	2015-16	CP Annual Update
PROJECT- LEVEL INDICATORS			
HF Placement Indicators			
Number of individuals placed in housing through an HF intervention	CTD	2016-17	HERIN
Percentage of HF clients who remained housed at six months	80%	2016-17	HERIN
Percentage of HF clients who remained housed at twelve months	80%	2016-17	HERIN
Number of days to move HF clients into permanent housing (after intake or assessment - to be determine by the community)	CTD	2016-17	HERIN
Percentage of HF clients who were re-housed	<30%	2016-17	HERIN
Percentage of HF clients who return to homelessness	<15%	201617	HERIN
Non-HF Placement Indicator			
Percentage of Non-HF clients who remained housed at six months	80%	2016-17	HERIN
Self-Sufficiency Indicators			
Percentage of HF clients who have successfully exited the program to a positive housing situation	CTD	2017-18	HERIN
Number of people who increased their employment stability or started part-time or full-time employment	CTD	2016-17	HERIN
Number of people who increased their income or income stability	CTD	2016-17	HERIN
Number of people who started part-time or full-time education	CTD	2016-17	HERIN
Number of people who started a job training program	CTD	2016-17	HERIN
Prevention Indicator			
Number of people that remained housed at three months after receiving a Housing Loss Prevention intervention ⚠	CTD	2016-17	HERIN
	80%	2017-18	HERIN

LEGEND	
Targets that community are responsible for developing in CP (CTD = community to develop)	CTD
New indicators being introduced for 2014-19	
National Homelessness Information System	NHIS
Homelessness Electronic Reporting Information Network	HERIN
Indicators included in ESDC Reports on Plans and Priorities (RPP) submitted to Parliament	⚠

NOTES

The National Homeless Information System data comes from the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) and non HIFIS systems.

HERIN collects project-level outcome data from all organizations receiving HPS funding under the Designated, Aboriginal and Rural and Remote funding streams

APPENDIX 3
INTERVIEW GUIDE

INFORMATION

1. How long have you experienced homelessness for? OR How long were you homeless for?
2. Are you aware that there is an effort going on to end homelessness?
   a. If NO, provide brief synopsis of the effort being made in Canada.

COMPREHENSION

1. Are you aware if your community has made a commitment to end homelessness? *(Skip question if response to previous question was NO)*
2. Have you seen any changes in the type of homeless services/programs in the past 5 to 10 years?
   a. If YES: What changes have you seen? Do you see these changes as an improvement over the previous services/programs?
   b. If NO: What are your general thoughts on the current services/programs being offered? Do you see them as being effective?

APPLICATION

1. What do you think 'ending homelessness' means?
2. What would ending homelessness look like from your perspective?
3. When would you consider yourself no longer homeless? OR When did you no longer consider yourself homeless?

ANALYSIS

1. Do you think other people who are experiencing homelessness might agree with your definition? Can you explain please?
2. Based on your definition, do you think the necessary services/programs are in place to help you achieve this goal? Can you explain please?

SYNTHESIS/EVALUATION

1. What services/programs do you think might help yourself or other homeless persons exit out of homelessness? Can you explain please?

CONCLUSION

1. Is there anything else relating to the topic of 'ending homelessness' that you would like to mention?

APPENDIX 4 CANADIAN DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS

	OPERATIONAL CATEGORY		LIVING SITUATION	GENERIC DEFINITION
1. UNSHELTERED	This includes people who lack housing and are not accessing emergency shelters or accommodation, except during extreme weather conditions. In most cases, people are staying in places that are not designed for or fit for human habitation.	1.1	People living in public or private spaces without consent or contract	▪ Public space, such as sidewalks, squares, parks, forests, etc. ▪ Private space and vacant buildings (squatting)
		1.2	People living in places not intended for permanent human habitation	▪ Living in cars or other vehicles ▪ Living in garages, attics, closets or buildings not designed for habitation ▪ People in makeshift shelters, shacks or tents
2. EMERGENCY SHELTERED	This refers to people who, because they cannot secure permanent housing, are accessing emergency shelter and system supports, generally provided at no cost or minimal cost to the user. Such accommodation represents an institutional response to homelessness provided by government, non-profit, faith based organizations and / or volunteers.	2.1	Emergency overnight shelters for people who are homeless	These facilities are designed to meet the immediate needs of people who are homeless. Such short-term emergency shelters may target specific sub-populations, including women, families, youth or Aboriginal persons, for instance. These shelters typically have minimal eligibility criteria, offer shared sleeping facilities and amenities, and often expect clients to leave in the morning. They may or may not offer food, clothing or other services. Some emergency shelters allow people to stay on an ongoing basis while others are short term and are set up to respond to special circumstances, such as extreme weather.
		2.2	Shelters for individuals/ families impacted by family violence	
		2.3	Emergency shelter for people fleeing a natural disaster or destruction of accommodation due to fires, floods, etc.	
3. PROVISIONALLY ACCOMMODATED	This describes situations in which people, who are technically homeless and without permanent shelter, access accommodation that offers no prospect of permanence. Those who are provisionally accommodated may be accessing temporary housing provided by government or the non-profit sector, or may have independently made arrangements for short-term accommodation.	3.1	Interim Housing for people who are homeless	Interim housing is a systems-supported form of housing that is meant to bridge the gap between unsheltered homelessness or emergency accommodation and permanent housing.
		3.2	People living temporarily with others, but without guarantee of continued residency or immediate prospects for accessing permanent housing	Often referred to as 'couch surfers' or the 'hidden homeless', this describes people who stay with friends, family, or even strangers.
		3.3	People accessing short term, temporary rental accommodations without security of tenure	In some cases people who are homeless make temporary rental arrangements, such as staying in motels, hostels, rooming houses, etc.
		3.4	People in institutional care who lack permanent housing arrangements	People who may transition into homelessness upon release from: Penal institutions; Medical / mental health institutions; Residential treatment programs or withdrawal management centers; Children's institutions / group homes.
		3.5	Accommodation / reception centers for recently arrived immigrants and refugees	Prior to securing their own housing, recently arrived immigrants and refugees may be temporarily housed while receiving settlement support and orientation to life in Canada.
4. AT-RISK OF HOMELESSNESS	Although not technically homeless, this includes individuals or families whose current housing situations are dangerously lacking security or stability, and so are considered to be at-risk of homelessness. They are living in housing that is intended for permanent human habitation, and could potentially be permanent (as opposed to those who are provisionally accommodated). However, as a result of external hardship, poverty, personal crisis, discrimination, a lack of other available and affordable housing, and / or the inappropriateness of their current housing (which may be overcrowded or does not meet public health and safety standards) residents may be "at risk" of homelessness.	4.1	People at imminent risk of homelessness	▪ Those whose employment is precarious ▪ Those experiencing sudden unemployment ▪ Households facing eviction ▪ Housing with transitional supports about to be discontinued ▪ People with severe and persistent mental illness, active addictions, substance use, and / or behavioural issues ▪ Breakdown in family relations ▪ People facing, or living in direct fear, of violence / abuse
		4.2	Individuals and families who are precariously housed	Those who face challenges that may or may not leave them homeless in the immediate or near future. CMHC defines a household as being in core housing need if its housing: "falls below at least one of the adequacy, affordability or suitability standards and would have to spend 30% or more of its total before-tax income to pay the median rent of alternative local housing that is acceptable (meets all three housing standards)."

For a more detailed typology of the Canadian Definition of Homelessness, go to: www.homelesshub.ca/homelessdefinition